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Emmert

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(54) **REINFORCEMENT MEMBER TO ENHANCE ROTATIONAL MOTION SUCH AS FOR USE IN A STILT DEVICE**

(75) Inventor: **Raymond L. Emmert**, Humacao, PR (US)

(73) Assignee: **Emmert Second Limited Partnership**, Humacao, PR (US)

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A63B 25/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **482/75**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 482/75–77, 482/23, 27–29; 623/28
See application file for complete search history.

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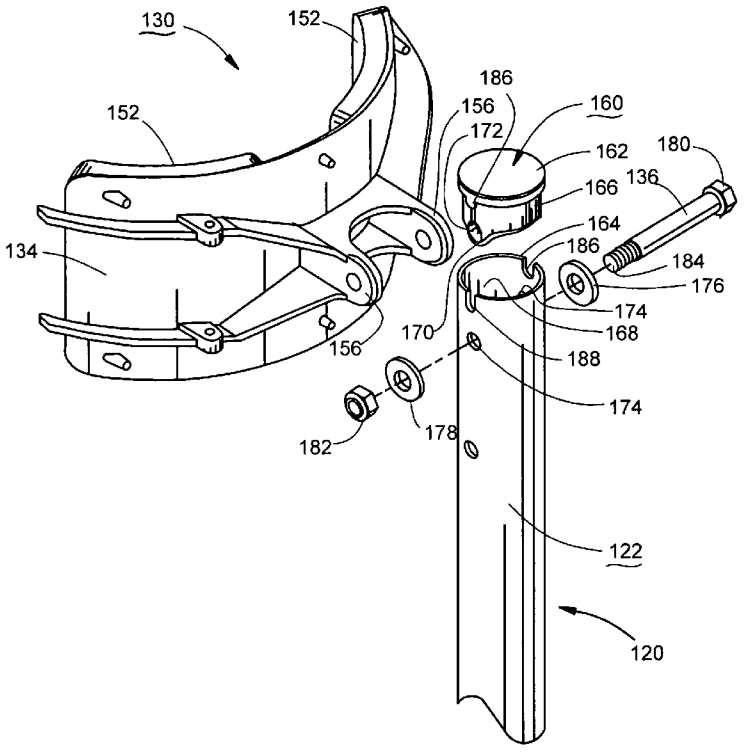
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Primary Examiner—Fenn C Mathew
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Fellers, Snider, et al.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Apparatus for enhancing relative rotation between a substrate and a rotatable member. The substrate preferably comprises a pole of a leg support assembly in a stilt device, and the rotatable member preferably comprises a leg engagement assembly of the stilt device which engages a user's leg. The reinforcement member preferably operates as a spacer for the substrate, as well as to reduce wear between the substrate and an elongated member which couples the rotatable member to the substrate. A limit surface of the reinforcement member limits mechanical deflection of the elongated member and preferably comprises an annular sidewall of an aperture. A locking feature of the reinforcement member preferably comprises a tab which engages a channel in the substrate to maintain a desired axial orientation of the reinforcement member.

16 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



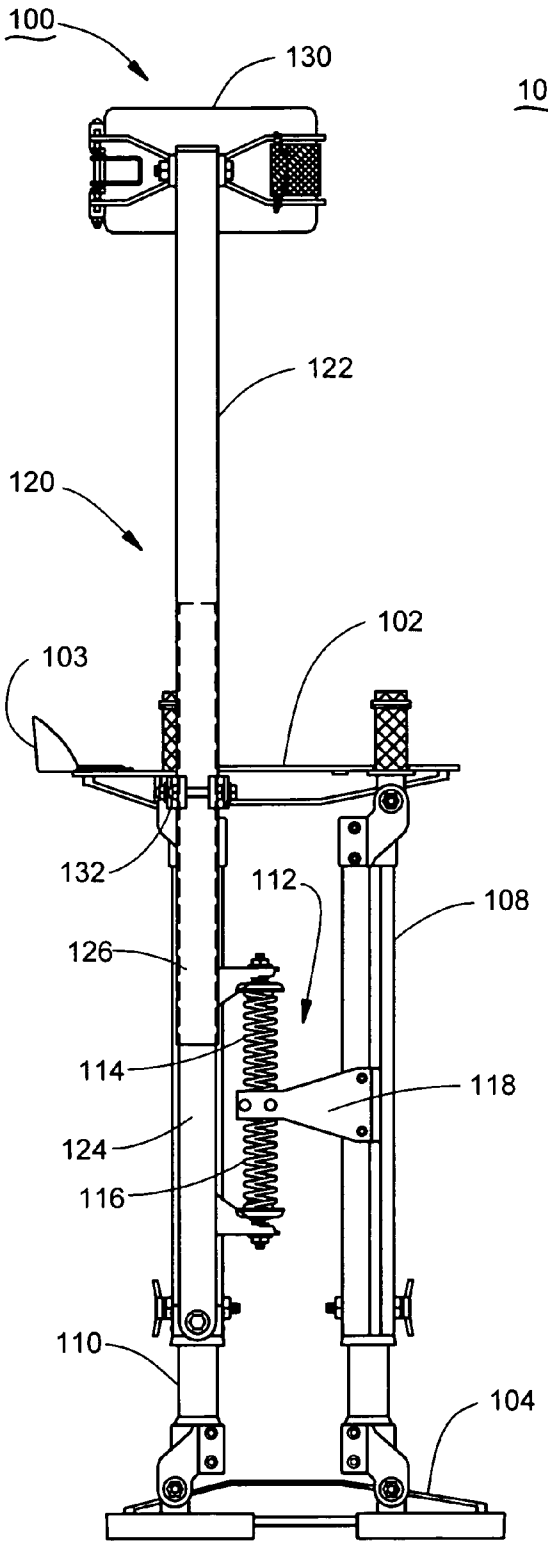

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FIG. 1

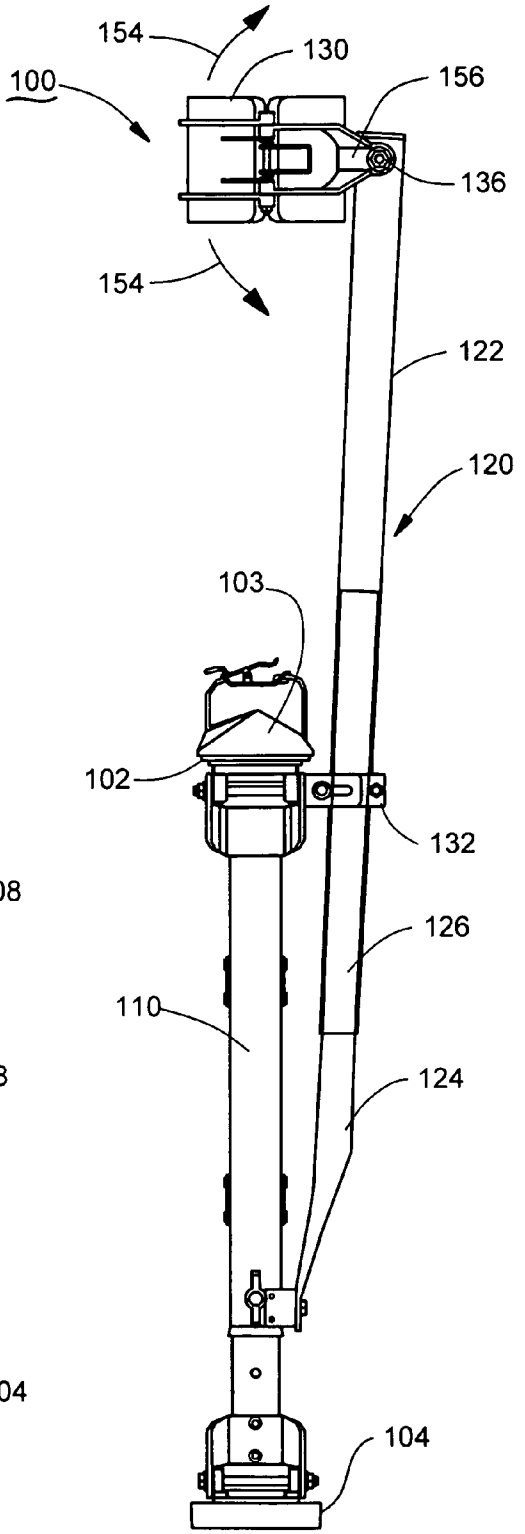

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FIG. 2

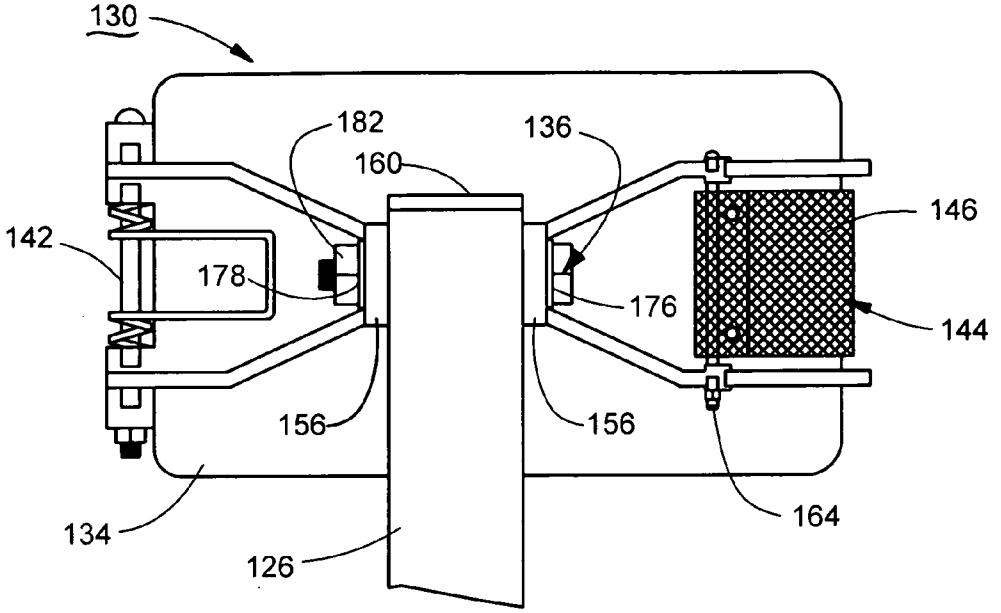

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FIG. 3

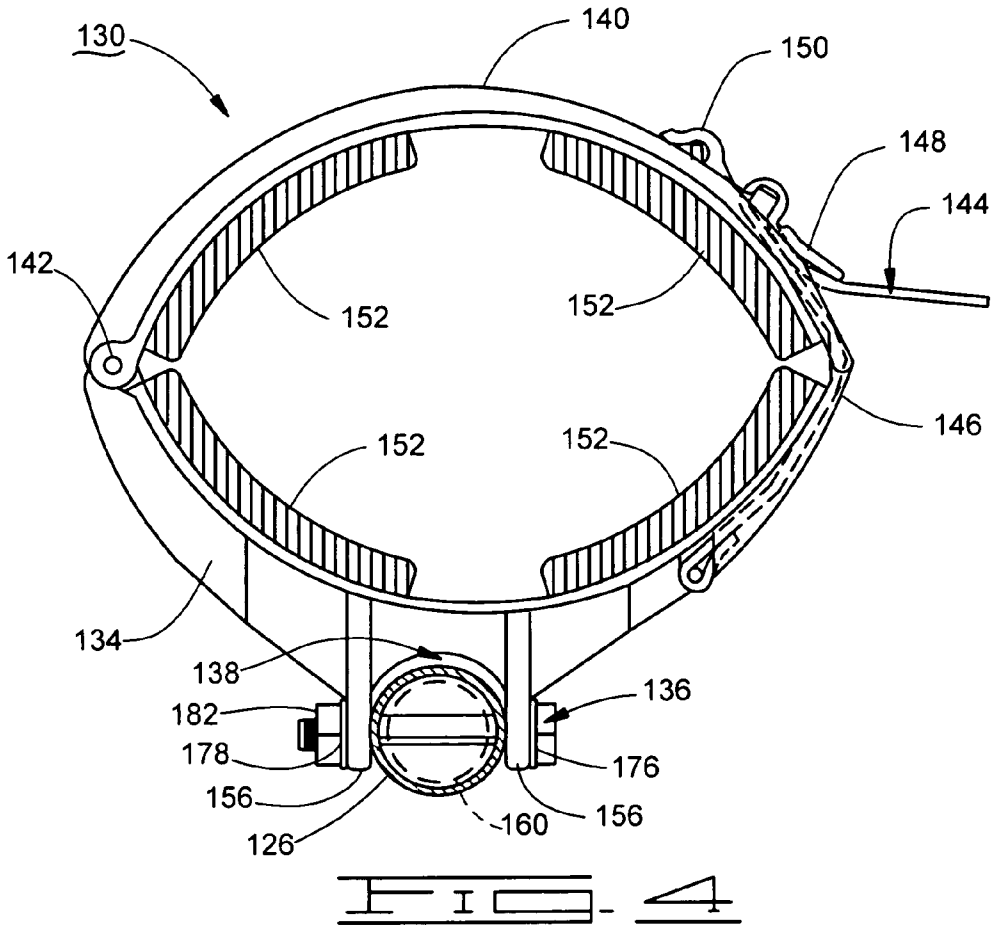

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FIG. 4

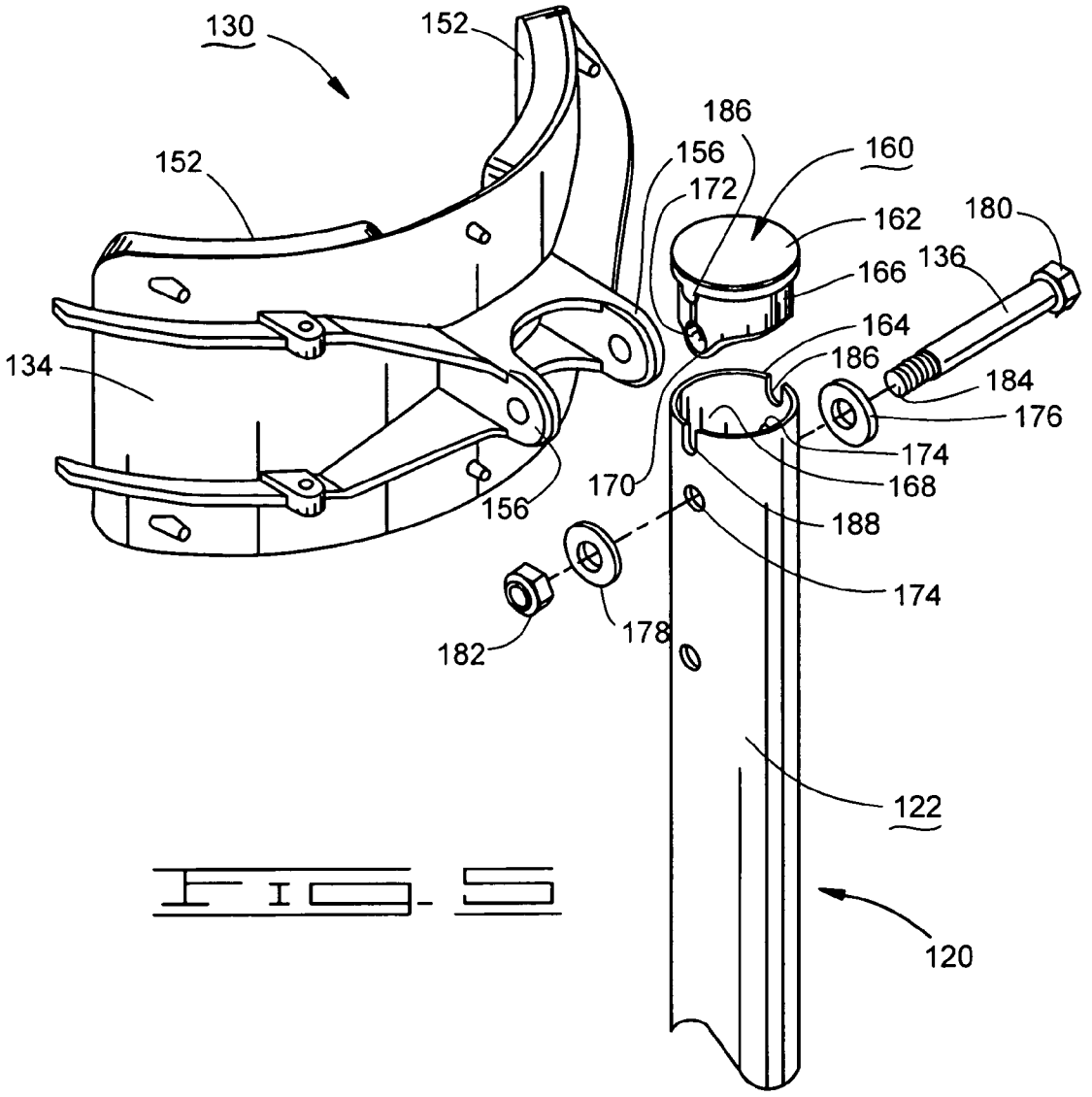

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FIG. 5

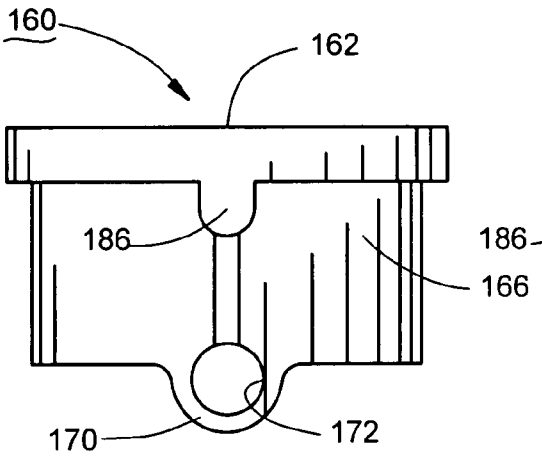


FIG. 6

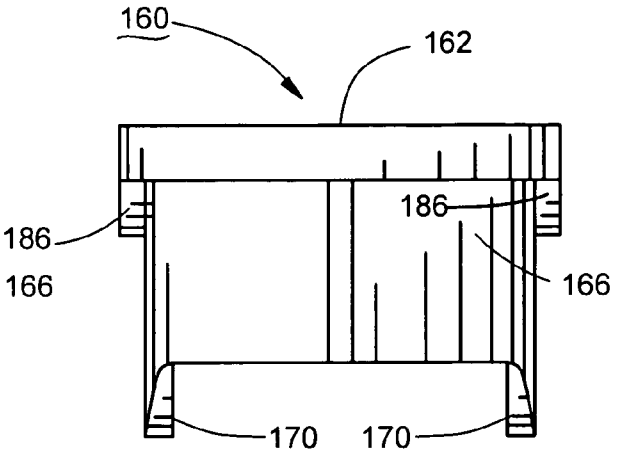


FIG. 7

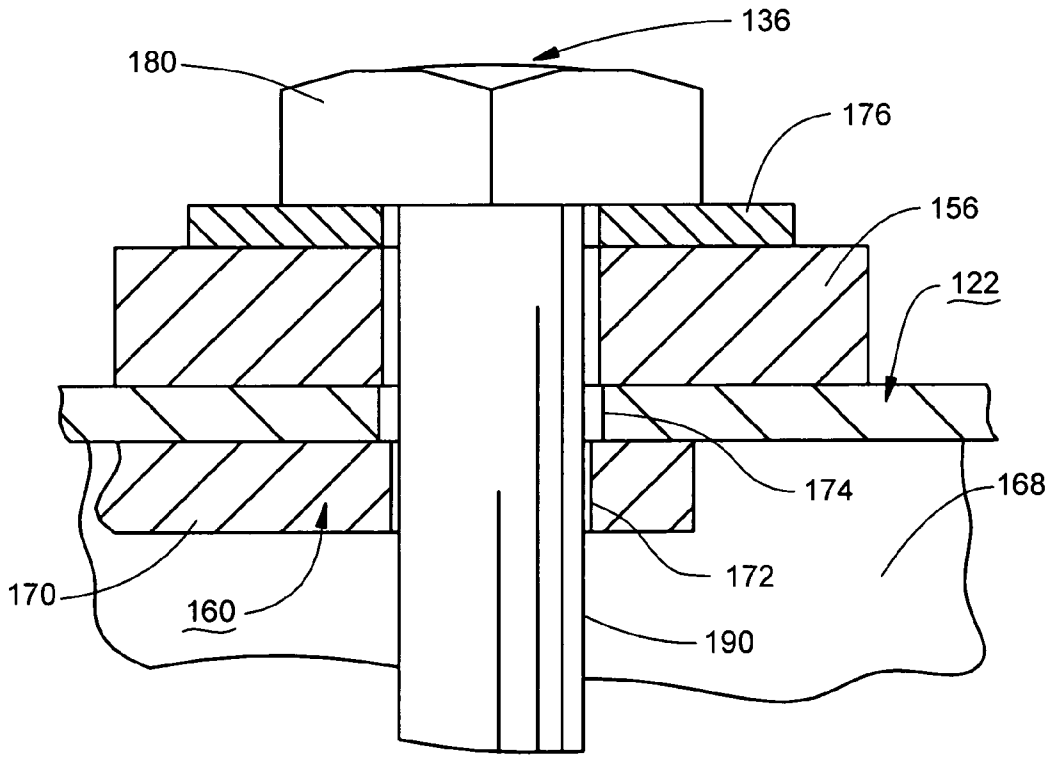


FIG. 8

REINFORCEMENT MEMBER TO ENHANCE ROTATIONAL MOTION SUCH AS FOR USE IN A STILT DEVICE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

Without limitation, the present invention relates generally to extension mechanisms (stilt devices) used to allow a user to maneuver at an increased height, and more particularly to a reinforcement member used to provide spacer support and reduce wear between a leg engagement assembly and a leg support pole.

BACKGROUND

Leg extension mechanisms (stilt devices) advantageously allow a user to maneuver at an increased height above a base surface. Stilt devices are often used in the construction industry to allow users to perform building or repair operations several feet above the ground and which could not otherwise be reachable without use of a scaffold or other support structure.

A particularly useful stilt device is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 3,902,199 issued to Emmert. While operable, there remains a continual need for advancements in the art to improve operational characteristics of such devices, and it is to these and other improvements that preferred embodiments of the present invention are generally directed.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Preferred embodiments of the present invention are generally directed to a reinforcement member provided to enhance relative rotation between a substrate and a rotatable member. The substrate preferably comprises a pole of a leg support assembly in a stilt device, and the rotatable member preferably comprises a leg engagement assembly which engages a leg of a user of the stilt device.

The reinforcement member preferably operates as a spacer for the substrate and reduces wear between the substrate and an elongated member, such as a threaded fastener, which couples the rotatable member to the substrate.

In accordance with some preferred embodiments, the substrate comprises a wall surface and the elongated member comprises a sidewall which extends adjacent the wall surface to form a gap therebetween. The elongated member preferably facilitates relative rotation between the substrate and the rotatable member about a central axis along which the elongated member is nominally aligned.

The reinforcement member preferably comprises a limit surface which extends adjacent the sidewall of the elongated member to form a second gap therebetween. The limit surface is preferably configured to reduce mechanical contact between the sidewall of the elongated member and the wall surface of the substrate as a result of mechanical deflection of the elongated member away from the central axis and toward the wall surface during said relative rotation.

The reinforcement member further preferably comprises a locking feature which engages the substrate to substantially prevent axial displacement of the reinforcement member relative to the substrate. In this way, the wall surface and the limit surface are substantially maintained in a fixed relationship with respect to the central axis.

The reinforcement member preferably comprises a cap portion configured to engage a second wall of the substrate, a body which depends from the cap portion, and a collar portion which extends from the body. The limit surface preferably comprises an annular sidewall of an aperture which extends through the collar portion. The locking feature of the reinforcement member preferably comprises a tab which extends from the body and engages a channel in the substrate.

While a variety of materials can be utilized, the substrate and the elongated member are both preferably formed of metal, and the reinforcement member is preferably formed of nylon or other material with suitable wear resistance characteristics. In this way, the reinforcement member prevents or reduces metal-on-metal wear between the substrate and the elongated member.

These and various other features and advantages which characterize the claimed invention will be apparent from a reading of the following detailed description and a review of the associated drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** provides an elevational side view representation of a stilt device constructed in accordance with preferred embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. **2** provides an elevational rear view representation of the stilt device.

FIG. **3** provides a side view of a clam-shell assembly configured to engage a leg of the user in conjunction with a reinforcement member constructed in accordance with preferred embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. **4** provides a top plan view of FIG. **3**.

FIG. **5** provides an isometric, exploded view of relevant portions of FIGS. **3** and **4** to illustrate the reinforcement member in greater detail.

FIG. **6** is an elevational view of the reinforcement member in a first direction.

FIG. **7** is another elevational view of the reinforcement member in a second member orthogonal to the first direction.

FIG. **8** provides a cross-sectional view to illustrate a preferred installation of the reinforcement member.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Numerous possible variations and modifications will readily occur to the skilled artisan upon a review of the following discussion. Thus, it will be understood that the various exemplary embodiments disclosed herein are illustrative of, and are not limiting to, the scope of the claimed invention.

FIGS. **1** and **2** show side and rear elevational views, respectively, of a stilt device **100** configured to support a user above a base support (floor) surface (denoted at **101**).

A normally horizontal top member, or shoe bracket **102** is configured to abuttingly support a shoe or boot worn by a user (not shown). An arcuate heel plate **103** extends upwardly at the rear of the shoe bracket **102** to abuttingly support the heel of the user's shoe or boot.

The shoe bracket **102** is supported above base support member, or foot member **104** by front and rear struts **108**, **110**. The struts **108**, **110** are preferably telescopic in nature to allow the user to selectively adjust via fasteners **111** the relative height of the shoe bracket **102** above the base support surface **101**.

A damping assembly **112** comprises upper and lower damping springs **114**, **116** affixed to the rear strut **110** and a rigid actuator arm **118** which extends from the front strut **108** to a medial position between the springs **114**, **116**. The damping assembly **112** nominally biases the stilt device **100** to the parallelogram shape shown in FIG. **1**. The damping assembly **112** further provides flexibility to the user by permitting lim-

ited forward and rearward pivoting of the struts **108**, **110** with respect to the shoe bracket **102** during maneuvering by the user.

A leg attachment assembly **120** comprises a telescopic support pole **122** (support) which can be adjusted as desired to fit the leg of the user. The support **122** includes inner and outer sleeves **124**, **126**. A proximal end of the inner sleeve **124** is affixed to the rear strut **110** and a distal end of the inner sleeve **124** is inserted up into the outer sleeve **126**.

The leg attachment assembly **120** further preferably comprises a leg attachment (clam-shell) assembly **130** and a support attachment assembly **132**. A distal end of the outer sleeve **126** supports the clam-shell assembly **130** as discussed below to support the user's leg at a position just below the user's knee. The lateral extent and relative angle of the support **122** with respect to the shoe bracket **102** are adjustable using the support attachment assembly **132**.

It is envisioned that during normal usage a user will typically wear two such stilt devices **100**, with one being attached to each leg. The two stilt devices **100** will generally be configured in a mirrored fashion so that the support **122** extends along the outside of each leg. Thus, it will be understood that the stilt device **100** shown in the drawings is a "right-footed" version, and the corresponding "left-footed" version has been omitted for simplicity of discussion.

FIGS. **3** and **4** provide side and top plan views, respectively, of the clam-shell assembly **130**. The assembly **130** includes a curved outer plate **134**, which is affixed to the outer sleeve **126** of the support **122** via fastener **136**. A gap shown at **138** in FIG. **4** permits a limited amount of pivotal (rotational) movement of the outer plate **134** with respect to the sleeve **126** to improve comfort and flexibility for the user.

A curved inner plate **140** is disposed in facing relation to the outer plate **134**. The inner plate **140** is pivotally affixed to the outer plate **134** via hinge pin **142**. A biasing spring **143** preferably biases the inner and outer plates to the closed position as shown in FIG. **4**. For clarity, the use of the terms "inner" and "outer" are referenced with respect to the user's leg (e.g., the inner plate **140** is disposed adjacent the inner portion of the user's leg).

A strap assembly **144** secures the inner and outer plates **134**, **140** in the closed position around the user's leg during use. The strap assembly **144** includes a flexible nylon or similar strap **146** and a threaded buckle **148**. A proximal end of the strap **146** is affixed to the outer plate **134**, and the buckle **148** engages a tab **150** on the inner plate **140**. In a preferred embodiment, foam blocks **152** are affixed along the interior surfaces of the inner and outer plates **134**, **140** to provide further cushioning for the user. The inner and outer plates **134**, **140** are preferably formed from injection molded plastic, nylon, or other suitable material.

As mentioned above, the clam-shell assembly **130** is preferably configured to provide a limited range of rotational movement about the fastener **136**. This range of motion is generally denoted by arrows **154** in FIG. **2**. Collar members **156** extend from the outer plate **134** to positions adjacent opposing sides of the pole **122** to receive the fastener **136**. In this way, the assembly **130** pivots about a central axis along which the fastener **136** is aligned, and the upper and lower extents of travel by the assembly **130** are limited by respective contacting engagement of the plate **134** with the pole **122**.

Referring now to FIG. **5**, a reinforcement member **160** is preferably provided to enhance the rotational movement by the clam-shell assembly **130**. The member **160** advantageously operates to provide increased structural support, and reduces wear upon the pole **122**. The reinforcement member **160** is preferably formed from injection molded plastic, nylon, or other suitable material.

As further shown in FIGS. **6** and **7**, the reinforcement member **160** preferably includes an annular cap portion **162** sized to abut a distal surface **164** of the pole **122**. An annular body **166** depends from the cap portion **162** and is preferably sized to provide a close fit against an interior annular surface **168** of the pole **122**. Opposing collar portions **170** depend from the body **166** as shown.

Each collar portion **170** includes a central aperture **172** which substantially aligns with a corresponding aperture **174** of the pole **122**. In this way, with reference again to FIG. **5**, the fastener **136** is preferably inserted through a first washer **176**, the first collar member **156**, the first pole aperture **174**, the first reinforcement member aperture **122**, the second reinforcement member aperture **172**, the second pole aperture **174**, the second collar member **156**, and a second washer **178**. A head portion **180** of the fastener **136** is preferably brought into contacting abutment with the first washer **176** and a threaded lock nut **182** engages a threaded end **184** of the fastener **136** to complete the installation.

The reinforcement member **160** is further preferably provided with a pair of opposing retention tabs **186**. The tabs **186** abut the cap portion **162** and body **166**, and are sized to nest within locking channels **188** formed in the top surface **164** of the pole **122**. This preferably operates to maintain the reinforcement member **160** in a fixed rotational orientation with respect to the pole **122**.

It can now be seen that the reinforcement member **160** preferably operates as an internal spacer to resist the compressive forces supplied to opposing sides of the pole **122** by the fastener **136** and nut **182**. This advantageously enhances the structural rigidity of the pole **122**.

Additionally, the reinforcement member **160** preferably reduces wear upon the pole **122** by mechanically isolating the fastener **136** from the pole **122**. While a variety of materials can be utilized, in a preferred embodiment the pole **122** comprises aluminum tube stock and the fastener is formed of stainless steel. The reinforcement member **160** is thus configured to reduce metal-on-metal contact and wear between an outer sidewall surface of the fastener **136** and an interior wall surface of the aperture **174** in the pole **122**.

As shown in FIG. **8**, the apertures **172** of the retaining member **160** are each preferably sized to have a smaller diameter than the corresponding diameters of the apertures **174** of the pole **122**. In the event the fastener **136** is induced to move relative to the pole **122** in such a way that the fastener **136** is deflected away from the central rotational axis and toward the wall of the aperture **174**, the wall surfaces of the aperture **172** serve to limit the extent to which a wearing action can be made upon the walls of the apertures **174**. This advantageously prevents elongation of the apertures **174** over time from a circular to an oval shape.

The locking tabs **186** and channels **188** further limit such wear by maintaining the respective apertures **172**, **174** in a common axial alignment. That is, the tabs **186** and channels **188** cooperate to maintain a fixed interrelationship of the wall of aperture **174** and the limit surface of aperture **172** with respect to the central axis.

While the diameter of the aperture **172** is preferably smaller than the diameter of the aperture **174**, this is not necessarily required. Rather, as desired the diameter of the aperture **172** can be made the same as, or even larger than the diameter of the aperture **174**. The diameter of the fastener **136** (or other elongated member) can also be varied along the length thereof. It will be appreciated that such variations will

generally tend to alter the extent to which the limiting operation of the apertures **172** serves to reduce wear upon the support **122**.

It is preferred, though not required, that the reinforcement member **160** be formed from a material (e.g., nylon) that is less susceptible to wear from contact with the stainless steel fastener **136** as compared to the support **122** (e.g., aluminum).

While the limit surfaces of the reinforcement member **160** have been disclosed as being preferably annular in shape, such is not necessarily limiting; rather, any suitable shapes can be provided to the limit surfaces. Similarly, the use of a fastener **136** as a pivot member is preferred, but not required; rather, any type of pin or other elongated member can be used depending on the requirements of a given application.

In the same way, the claimed invention is not necessarily limited to the specific embodiments, environment or application disclosed herein. For example, the reinforcement member **160** can be utilized with other types of leg attachment assemblies besides the clam-shell assembly **130**. The reinforcement member **160** can also be used with other stilt components, such as in conjunction with the attachment of the foot plate **104**, or even in an application that is not stilt-related at all.

Similarly, the substrate through which the elongated member extends need not necessarily be annular as is the case with the exemplary pole **122**, but could rather take any number of desired shapes including a substantially flat planar shape, a rectangular tube, etc. While two opposing limit surfaces have been provided by the pair of apertures **172**, in other embodiments only a single limit surface is provided, or more than two limit surfaces are provided along the length of the elongated member.

It will now be recognized that some preferred embodiments of the present invention are generally directed to an apparatus comprising a substrate (such as the pole **122**) comprising a wall surface (such as the wall of aperture **174**), a rotatable member (such as clam-shell assembly **130**) adjacent the substrate, and an elongated member (such as fastener **136**) comprising a sidewall which extends adjacent the wall surface to form a gap therebetween (see FIG. **8**—gap between **174** and **190**).

The elongated member facilitates relative rotation between the substrate and the rotatable member (such as denoted by arrows **154**) about a central axis along which the elongated member is nominally aligned.

A reinforcement member (such as **160**) comprises a limit surface (such as the sidewall of aperture **172**) which extends adjacent the sidewall of the elongated member to form a second gap therebetween (see FIG. **8**—gap between **172** and **190**). The limit surface is configured to reduce mechanical contact between the sidewall of the elongated member and the wall surface of the substrate (e.g., between the pole **122** and fastener **136**) as a result of mechanical deflection of the elongated member away from the central axis and toward the wall surface during said relative rotation.

The reinforcement member further preferably comprises a locking feature (such as tab **186**) which engages the substrate (such as at channel **188** in surface **164**) to substantially prevent axial displacement of the reinforcement member relative to the substrate so that the wall surface and the limit surface are substantially maintained in a fixed relationship with respect to the central axis.

Preferably, the substrate comprises a pole support of a leg support assembly in a stilt device, the elongated member comprises a threaded fastener, and the rotatable member comprises a leg engagement assembly that engages a user's leg.

For purposes of the appended claims, the recited "first means" will be construed as corresponding to the disclosed reinforcement member **160** as shown in FIGS. **4-8**.

It is to be understood that even though numerous characteristics and advantages of various embodiments of the present invention have been set forth in the foregoing description, together with details of the structure and function of various embodiments of the invention, this detailed description is illustrative only, and changes may be made in detail, especially in matters of structure and arrangements of parts within the principles of the present invention to the full extent indicated by the broad general meaning of the terms in which the appended claims are expressed.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus comprising:

a substrate comprising a wall surface with an annular sidewall of a first aperture that extends through the substrate and has a first overall diameter;

a rotatable member adjacent the substrate;

an elongated member comprising a sidewall which extends adjacent the wall surface to form a first gap therebetween, the elongated member facilitating relative rotation between the substrate and the rotatable member about a central axis along which the elongated member is nominally aligned; and

a reinforcement member comprising:

a limit surface which comprises an annular sidewall of a second aperture that extends through the reinforcement member and has a second overall diameter less than the first overall diameter, the limit surface extending adjacent the sidewall of the elongated member to form a second gap therebetween, the limit surface configured to reduce mechanical contact between the sidewall of the elongated member and the wall surface of the substrate as a result of mechanical deflection of the elongated member away from the central axis and toward the wall surface during said relative rotation; and

a locking feature which engages the substrate to substantially prevent axial displacement of the reinforcement member relative to the substrate so that the wall surface and the limit surface are substantially maintained in a fixed relationship with respect to the central axis;

wherein the substrate is characterized as a pole, wherein the reinforcement member is characterized as a spacer sized to nest within said pole, and wherein the elongated member successively and concurrently extends through a first side of the pole, through a first side of the reinforcement member, through a second opposing side of the reinforcement member, and through a second opposing side of the pole.

2. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the wall surface of the substrate comprises an annular sidewall of an aperture that extends through the substrate.

3. The apparatus of claim **2**, wherein the aperture is characterized as a first aperture, and wherein the limit surface of the reinforcement member comprises an annular sidewall of a second aperture that extends through the reinforcement member.

4. The apparatus of claim **3**, wherein the first aperture has a first diameter, and wherein the second aperture has a second diameter less than the first diameter.

5. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the elongated member comprises a threaded fastener which engages the substrate and the rotatable member to apply a compressive force thereto.

6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the rotatable member comprises a leg attachment assembly configured to engage a leg of a user.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the reinforcement member comprises a cap portion configured to engage a second wall of the substrate, a body which depends from the cap portion, and a collar portion which extends from the body.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the limit surface comprises an annular sidewall of an aperture which extends through the collar portion, and wherein the locking feature comprises a tab which extends from the body.

9. An apparatus comprising:

a reinforcement member configured to reduce mechanical wear between a substrate and an elongated member, the reinforcement member comprising:

a limit surface which extends adjacent a sidewall of the elongated member to form a gap therebetween, the limit surface configured to reduce mechanical contact between the sidewall of the elongated member and a first wall surface of the substrate as a result of mechanical deflection of the elongated member away from a central axis and toward the wall surface;

a cap portion configured to engage a second wall surface of the substrate, a body which depends from the cap portion, and a collar portion which extends from the body; and

a locking feature which engages the substrate to substantially prevent axial displacement of the reinforcement member relative to the substrate so that the wall surface and the limit surface are substantially maintained in a fixed relationship with respect to the central axis,

wherein the wall surface of the substrate comprises an annular sidewall of a first aperture that extends through the substrate and has a first overall diameter, wherein the limit surface of the reinforcement member comprises an annular sidewall of a second aperture that extends through the reinforcement member and has a second overall diameter less than the first overall diameter, and wherein the elongated member concurrently extends through the first and second apertures.

10. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the limit surface of the reinforcement member comprises an annular sidewall of an aperture which extends through the collar portion, wherein the elongated member extends through said aperture.

11. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the body is characterized as annular and configured to nest within the substrate.

12. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the reinforcement member further comprises a second collar portion comprising a second aperture with an annular sidewall configured as a second limit surface, wherein the elongated member further extends through said second aperture.

13. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the reinforcement member further comprises a spacer surface that engages the substrate to resist a compressive force applied to the substrate by the elongated member.

14. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the locking feature comprises a tab which engages a corresponding channel in the substrate to establish a desired angular orientation of the reinforcement member with respect to the substrate.

15. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the substrate comprises a leg support pole of a stilt device leg attachment assembly, wherein the elongated member comprises a threaded fastener that secures an engagement assembly configured to engage a user's leg to the support pole, and wherein the retention member is configured to nest within a distal end of the support pole.

16. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the substrate and the elongated member are each formed of metal, and wherein the reinforcement member comprises nylon.

* * * * *